

Session 100
Shelach – Straying After Your Eyes
19 June 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFTuxAr10C4>

Ari

Shalom my friends! How are you? Good to see you! Mazel tov! One hundred, this is our hundredth session! That's a very big deal, this is a big landmark. For some reason, I don't know exactly why it's a big landmark, but I believe it is and I pray that HaShem uses this landmark as an opportunity to strengthen my internet connection and make sure that we stay connected here the whole time. I'm here at the Farm and all of a sudden, boom! The crazy winds happen and it's just coming in and out. But we're not gonna let that get in our way. We're not gonna let the fear and the doubts hit us. Because really I think it's more than a coincidence that this landmark of our 100th session falls out on Parashat Shelach. Because it's a landmark portion in the Torah. I think it's one of the most critical for our generation and in my life personally. Because I always feel a certain amount of pressure when this Torah portion Shelach approaches because it's so precious to me. I don't want to say it's my favorite because number one, you can't play favorites or ascribe varying levels of importance to the Word of God, right? Like in the Torah, in our eyes, these seemingly insignificant portions should really be regarded with the same reverence as that which seems the most significant.

And number two, it's a sad and it's a painful and it's a tragic portion. So the word favorite doesn't really feel right anyways. But in my heart, this portion contains the most consequential event in Jewish history. It's a mistake, it's an error or better yet, it's even a sin that is so central and so tragic, that I believe the rectification of that very sin is indeed the calling of our generation. It is with all our mistakes in life, right? We have all these mistakes in life. All the times that we've fallen flat on our faces, all of the times when we've sunk to the lowest. There are sparks of light in all that darkness that we're supposed to raise up. There are new heights that we can achieve that we wouldn't have ever been able to do if we hadn't fallen so low.

Because the story was not supposed to end up like it did, right? If you could say such a thing, I don't know if you could say such a thing, the whole issue with free will. But you know Rabbi Jacobson, he really points out in a beautiful way that on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Nisan, we were redeemed from Egypt, and then there were seven weeks of growth and refinement, right? The omer that culminated in the giving of the Torah at Sinai. And then it was supposed to be an 11-day journey to Canaan where we conquered the Land, led by Moshe Rabbenu, he's supposed to lead us into the Land and he's supposed to build the Temple. And a Temple built by Moshe Rabbenu would never be destroyed. That would have ushered in Messianic times right there. And so this sin really delayed Messianic times and redemption and rectification by thousands of years and unbelievable amounts of pain and tears. It just wasn't meant to be,

right? It wasn't meant to be, that plan I just laid out. It wasn't meant to be because if it was meant to be it would have been.

But I think back to when I dated Shaena 14 years ago, right? We could have married then. I play the same game. And neither of us would have had to endure all of that pain and suffering and yearning. We wouldn't have had to endure all of that. That should have been the plan. But you know, just as the spies revealed that they weren't ready and the nation wasn't ready, right? For the ideal plan because if the nation was ready, they wouldn't have rejected the spies. But they didn't. They rejected Caleb and Joshua. So the nation wasn't ready, they weren't ready.

I can tell you that that growth and refinement needed to take place for me personally. Looking back at who I was then versus who I am now, I can testify that I needed to endure all that suffering to grow into the person I am now. And believe me, I have more than a little bit of growth that I still need to do. I think that's what brings us all together here. And so too, you know the sin of the spies bearing this evil report about the Land, right? We're going to spend a lot of this Fellowship reflecting upon that sin because within the sin itself, we can glean so much wisdom and guidance and instruction from looking at it with deep and honest eyes.

Ok, so I'm gonna get Jeremy, give me a second, I'm going to introduce you. But I just want to touch on this, right? Because I was saying, the portion of Shelach, it means so much to me personally. And you know, I have an idea of what I'm going to say, and I already don't feel like I've done justice to it, but I don't think there's anything I could say that would do justice to it. Because you know, many years, my whole life's mission was molded around fixing the sin of the spies in this week's Torah portion, which I always perceived as what? Speaking poorly of the Land of Israel, speaking of this holy beautiful Land in a disparaging way. Now the truth is, that I don't really know if it was the chicken or the egg, meaning as far back as I can remember, love for the Land of Israel has always burned fiercely within me.

Even now, just the other day, you know constantly I'm behind all these green and white license plates, these Arabs, and they just roll down their windows and throw garbage and coke cans out of the window onto the beautiful land in Judea. And I honk and I honk and sometimes I even get out. And I want to go...I'm not even thinking about danger, are they going to attack me? I'm thinking about that I'm just so enraged that they would defile and throw their trash on the most beautiful sacred Land. And you know, that's just in my heart. And so perhaps, you know perhaps this portion provided me with the Torah guidance for what was already a very much a part of me. But either way, it was this idea that brought Jeremy and I together in our mission and our service of HaShem, that brought us out to the Farm that animates us in everything that we do, right? Sharing the truth and beauty of the Land of Israel with the world. After all, our podcast that we used to do and Jeremy we need to start again, our podcast is

called Israel Inspired, and our network is called The Land of Israel Network. Our website is thelandofisrael.com, everything is the Land of Israel, that's everything we do.

And so, as I was immersing myself in the portion, I started coming to a slightly different conclusion, or perhaps not a different conclusion, but a deeper conclusion. Because on some level, you know our words, how we speak about things are the fruit of our thoughts, right? The outcome of our perceptions, the way we see things. And perhaps the real rectification, the real fixing, you know I'm starting to believe, the more I'm reflecting on the portion is not really about in our speech or about what we say about the Land, but it's in our eyes, right? The way we see things. And that's what I pray we will successfully reflect upon and internalize in today's Fellowship.

But before I get into that too much more, allow me to introduce my beloved friend and Rebbe, Jeremy who is preparing for a whirlwind tour throughout America. And he refuses to say the word "whirlwind," he says "worldwind," which drives me nuts. I've been asking him for years not to say that, but he moved to Israel when he was 12, and therefore all things considered, his English is actually quite impressive. So we'll let the worldwind slip and Jeremy, great to see you. You are up.

Jeremy

Yeah, it's really good to be here. I can't believe that we have a hundred sessions with this Fellowship. And to me, it's like a spice cart falling out of the sky. That the Land of Israel Fellowship, the one thing that has brought us all together IS the Land of Israel. And it is that that this Torah portion really guides us to. I mean, we encounter the greatest sin in the Torah. And the truth is, that's really counterintuitive. If you would have told me the greatest sin, I would have said, murder...I would have said the golden calf, idolatry, there's just so many. Complaining, not trusting in God. I don't know, there's a million sins that could have really pointed us to the worst of all sins. And the Torah points it to us because it's not intuitive, it's not an obvious claim. But it happened on the 9th of Av, and that is a day that we continue to commemorate to this very day, the destruction of the first Temple on the 9th of Av, the destruction of the 2nd Temple on the 9th of Av, the demolition orders were handed out in Gush Katif in the Land of Israel just about a decade ago, or a little bit more than, maybe two decades ago on the 9th of Av.

Destruction after destruction and the seeds of that, of the saddest day of the year. The sin that the people of Israel, we weren't able to atone for, we weren't able to say we're sorry, was the sin of the spies. I mean, we worshiped idols after God in the Ten Commandments says, "Do not worship idols." And we go and we worship idols. It's like, what a slap in the face. We were able to fix that, we were able to figure out how to do it. But the sin of the spies, it was like, "I'm sorry, you're not going into the Land of Israel anymore. Enough is enough." That's the 9th of Av, and that's actually going to be a day of crying now for generations to come. And 3,000 plus

years later, we're still suffering from that sin. It's almost like our relationship with HaShem, we're being told here, is expressed through the Land of Israel. If you don't love the Land of Israel, you're missing something. If you're not connected to the Land of Israel, you're missing something. Our relationship with God is going to somehow be mediated through the Land. If we don't behave in the Land, the Land is going to spit us out. And when we come back to the Land, and when we're outside of the Land, the Land is going to shut down. The Land will just become desolate, no one will be able to flourish there. Nothing will be able to grow there.

And then, when the Jewish people return to the Land of Israel, the Land is going to start to flourish again. It's like, how do we know where God is? What God's feeling? Where we're at in this journey toward redemption? It's all expressed through the Land of Israel. And it's here. We see behind us, like sort of the heart and the mission in some ways of the Land of Israel Fellowship. Like a headquarters, a physical reality that we're all building together. And where did we go to? To the edge of the desert in the middle of nowhere, in the edge of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, as deep in to the Promised Land as the Jews had arrived. And we started building there. And you know, there is no sure sign of the coming of Mashiach, then when the Jewish people return to the Land of Israel and the Land starts to flourish again.

And you know, the Land of Israel Fellowship, on our 100th Session, I just want to show you what we started this week, and this is really an amazing story. Because a small group of Fellowship members came to the Farm as a team. They were all from Colorado, they all love us to death, they follow us whenever I'm in Colorado, they host us, and they came out to the Farm. And post covid, there hasn't been any tour groups that have come out to the Farm. I think they were of the first, if not the first, one of the first that had come out. But they were the first tour group from the United State where the bus refused to come. They're like, "Oh, sorry, your road, it's just not up to code anymore. We've received notice, you can't come out to the Arugot Farm on a bus anymore." And that's pretty devastating for the Arugot Farm because the whole purpose of the Arugot Farm is that buses from the United States and Europe and around the world come out to our Farm to experience the spirit of Judea.

And they stop outside the gate, and then there's about a kilometer of road that Ari had to drive back and forth with his little tractor, put people in the back of the tractor, drive them back and forth. It was a little bit traumatic because it was unexpected. And that just had never happened ever from a group from the United States where the bus wasn't able to come. It actually happened a few times since then. And the group came from Colorado with a check in their hand. And I didn't know anything, you know we're just hosting people. Sometimes they bless us, sometimes they don't. Sometimes they help support us, sometimes they don't. Sometimes people come and they leave and you just never...and then a few months later, you just never know what's going to happen. And when we realized that we had...I mean, we ran this whole campaign now to fix up the infrastructure on the Farm and the road was part of it. Because buses can't come there anymore. It's just too...seven years, a dirt road needs to be

maintained. And we priced it out, and the blessing that they gave us was the exact original quote that we got to fix the road. And it was like as if they came, they were stopped. And before they even knew it, because they brought that donation from the United States before they ever knew they were even coming and when they were coming and what they needed. And it was like a perfect reality that they came, they were stopped, but don't worry, they had it going.

And so, I just want to share you this clip that I made this week, or at least last week. It's like the week of the Fellowship. As I was running in the morning through the mountains, because you talk about speaking slander of the Land of Israel, what's the opposite of that? It's loving the Land so much that you would go out to the edge of the desert and start building her up and making her beautiful. So I wanted to show you the first steps of our absolute revolution that we're starting now on the Arugot Farm with our campaign coming to an end. And this was the first steps of that, so I want you to see it.

(video)

Hey, good morning. I'm just in the middle of my run here and I want to show you what's happening.



Right here, behind us, the truck is bringing the new top layer to pave the road from Ibei HaNachal back to the Arugot Farm. This funny looking tractor here is the one that sort of straightens it out and then there's this big rolling guy. He comes and then flattens it. But if you can see now behind us, the road

to the Arugot Farm is slowly being repaved because of our Campaign. We are now fixing the infrastructure, bringing the Arugot Farm up to code.

But there's something deeper that's happening here. As the rocks are spilling out behind me. If you look at an aerial view of the Farm, our road is so beautiful. And who could have imagined, just a dirt road being so beautiful? But somehow, it's like a stroke of a painting. And really that's what we're building here on the Arugot Farm. A work of art. King David says, "I am my prayer." He doesn't say, "I have a life, and then sometimes I pray." He's like, "No, I am the prayer." And really that's what he's teaching us. That our whole life could be a prayer to God. The life that we live, the things that we do, the family that we raise, the places that we build. All of this is our prayer. It's our work of art. That at the end of our lives we'll present to our

Creator. And look at the masterpiece from the unpaved desert roads, to the newly paved road, and the Arugot Farm. And so in the mountains of Judea, we are quite literally constructing the crown, the diamond on the crown, in the mountains of Judea. So thank you all so much as we are rebuilding the Judean frontier with your help. Thank you. (end of video)

Thank you. Anyway, I wanted you to see that, that we just started. We're getting going now, we've started now, I mean, the truth is, I mean I'm leaving this Saturday night, or Sunday morning, depends how you look at it, on a lecture towards the United States. We're starting off, I think we're landing in Newark, and then we're crossing Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Colorado. I forgot the name of the states, to Texas, and then we're going all the way back to Florida. My poor children are going to be dizzy by the end of that trip.

But I'm a little bit upset that I'm gonna miss all of the...I'm going to come back to a new Farm. Because we have so much planned, and my dream is that there is a center in Haifa called the Bahai Gardens. And I don't know much about the Bahai religion, I think that they very much respect the Bible, but there is just no reason the Arugot Farm should not rival the Bahai Gardens. Like this mountain area here, why can't we make this more beautiful than the Bahai Gardens in Haifa? We should just make it an absolute masterpiece. And we're starting. We just started now. So thank you all for that and could it have been in better timing than on Parashat Shelach.

And I want to tell you this story because when we first moved out, Tehila and I to the Farm, her parents live in Ephrath, which is a settlement about 15 minutes closer to Jerusalem than the Arugot Farm. When we moved out to the Arugot Farm, because we were the only family moving there, for my in-laws sake, I might as well have moved to Afghanistan. That's what it was like. It was like, what? Where are you going? Where are you taking my grandchildren? What's happening? It was just so out of the ordinary. And so unheard of. That we would leave this beautiful community in Neve Daniel to move out to the mountains. And I don't know why we love what we love, and I don't think that no one has ever figured out that mystery. But HaShem has put a love of the Land of Israel in my heart, and somehow that same fire is in everyone's heart here in the Land of Israel Fellowship. And it is the thing that brings all the tribes of Israel together. It's the thing that brings all people together. It is where the Temple will stand as a House of Prayer for all nations. There is something about the Land of Israel that has the ability to bring it all together.

And here we are, all of us, building not only the most strategic area in Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, but the place where King David taught the world how to pray. And as we're building that road, that was the image that came to my mind. It's like another stroke, like a paintbrush on the mountain itself. Like this is our mark on the Land. And we have a place in Israel that we're building together in such a holy mountain. And just what else could we ask for? That we have a global fellowship that learns Torah together, a global fellowship that prays

together, and now a global fellowship that is quite literally building up the Land of Israel and making her beautiful again. And on our 100th Session, where we're taught the worst thing you can do is to speak poorly of the Land of Israel. And here we are, making her beautiful. If you want to know a trick, love what your friends love and your friends will love you. Love what God loves and God will love you. God loves the Land of Israel. So if you love what God loves, it's a trick. He just loves what you love, and He's going to love you for loving what He loves. And so all of us love the Land of Israel, but it's not just kind of a theoretical love or a theological love. We are quite literally building this monument that will last for generations, that was built by this Fellowship. And just what a marvelous thing to do together.

And so, I'm coming to the United States and my mission is to meet as many members of this Fellowship as I possibly can, that's the goal. And hopefully, we'll be able to spread the circle, gain more and more members in the fellowship, but really...I want to meet and spend time with as many people as we possibly can. And then of course, to make the invitation, although you already know, the Arugot Farm is open. Covid is over and the Arugot Farm is open for business. And so our gates are open and you are welcome anytime. We had our first members from the Fellowship that came, just like last week. And it's just an absolute blessing, just a joy. And so, that's what we've built this in order to in some ways, to model our lives after Abraham and Sarah. That there should be a place that asks no questions. Wherever you're from, whatever your background, you want to come to the Land of Israel and experience the mountains of King David, you are welcome, always.

And so, soon we'll see you in the United States. And then, even better, we'll see you in the Arugot Farm, the new and improved Arugot Farm after these summer renovations. So, on this 100th Session of our Fellowship, I just can't think of a more beautiful way to celebrate than on the parashah of those who spoke ill of the Land of Israel, for all of us to come together and make the Land of Israel beautiful again. So thank you all so much, and also next time we'll be broadcasting, it'll be from the other side of the world.

Ari

Jeremy, that was indeed very beautiful. And I didn't know you caught the actual steamroller paving the road. I thought of doing that and I'm glad you did. And yeah, the road has been paved. And while my wife loves it, the truth is, I sort of miss it. Because one of the things I do is give people rides on my ranger, my tractor, and going over those insane bumps was just fun and crazy, and it made what we were doing even nuttier. But I sort of like the whiplash that I get every time I took the road. It sort of reminded me on some sort of metaphoric level of how bumpy the journey has been to get out here. And now it just feels deceptively smooth. But either way, I'm excited that I don't need to spend my life convincing bus drivers to come out. So that's a good thing.

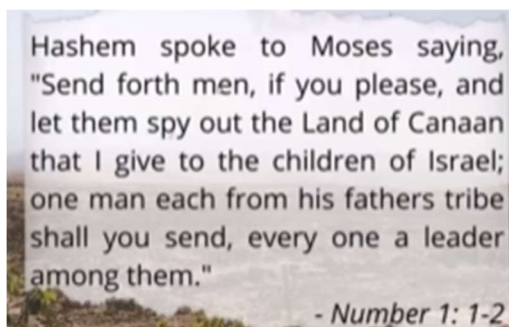
And this Shabbat, you know Jeremy just inspired me to share this story. We had this group of young Yeshiva students come out to the Farm. They were from a Yeshiva called Zilberman and they were just graduating High School. And to the naked eye, they looked like the average ultra-orthodox. And you know, they didn't even know where they were going. And when we were preparing for the prayers the next day, I said, "Can any of you read the Torah portion?" Because keep in mind, when you have the Torah open and you're reading the portion, you don't have any of the cantillation marks, you don't have any of the vowels, you need to have it all memorized. And they all raised their hands, every single one of them raised their hands. And I said, "Whoa, you can all do it?" And then they said that most of them actually know the entire Torah by heart. The entire Torah by heart. And how do they know that? There's a system that they have in this Yeshiva called Zilberman that my rabbi taught me when I was in the 3rd grade. One verse with this system and the system was in Hebrew and English is how he did it, (Ari sings the example, Hebrew and English). And the whole verse...I know that verse by heart because we made a song out of it and we repeated it a thousand times and that is what they do. They're like the guardians of the Torah and they repeat it with the cantillation marks and the vowels a thousand times and they actually memorize it, which is super impressive.

And so they came out to the farm, and I don't really think that they knew even where they were going. And that night between welcoming the Sabbath and the evening services, I told them what I told many people because they should know. I said that when we first came out to the Farm, we had to decide if we were going to spend our very limited resources, you know, putting up fences and security systems or planting trees and building. And we decided that it's one thing to take the Jew out of the ghetto, and it's another thing to take the ghetto out of the Jew. And that we are not going to build any fences and security systems. And as a matter of fact, I said to them, in this week's Torah portion when Moses sends the spies into the Land, he says that they should look and see if the cities are well fortified. And the sages of Israel, Rashi says that if the cities are well fortified, if they have up fences and walls and security systems, it means that they are weak. Why does it mean that they're weak? Because they're depending on those fences and walls and security systems. And I said, "We are not weak, we are very strong, and we don't need any of that. And we're not strong because of our muscles or because of our weapons. We are strong for one reason. Because HaShem is with us and protecting us."

And one of the guys that said to me, "Are you afraid of the Arabs? Are you afraid of them?" And I said to him with all this love in my heart, I said, "My friend, there needs to be some sort of modicum of shame of even asking that question." Even asking the question, are we afraid of them? How can we not be ashamed to even articulate that we would be afraid of them? Why shouldn't they be afraid of us? Well one reason is because we're not terrorists that are seeking to kill them. But I said, "Our fear needs to be so overwhelmingly harnessed and consumed with fear of HaShem that there simply is no room left in our hearts for fear of flesh and blood. And when we fear HaShem to such a degree that when we see Arabs who we fear may be jihadists

and seek to kill us, and we say we're not afraid of you. There's not even in our hearts a little bit of fear, then they become afraid of us, that's when the tables turn." I've seen it again and again and again. I've seen it with my partner, Yossi. You know those red signs that are in Judea and Samaria that say, "Do not enter this village, your lives will be in danger." Yossi my partner reads that, Baruchim habaim, Yossi – Welcome Yossi. That's how he will drive right in there with no fear. And I'm telling you I've seen fear in their eyes of him because he simply has no fear of them.

Anyways, we'll get more into this idea of fear in the Torah portion. But you know, I spent an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out where to start. How to weave together the verses to convey the narrative that I'm trying to share and it was impossible. I was running in circles and driving myself nuts. And then I realized the truth that I should always remember. You know, when you don't know where to start, just go back to the beginning. So let's do that. Let's open up our Torah, our Tanakh, our Bible to the book of Bemidbar, Parashat Shelach, it's chapter 13, verse 1:



So let's start there, send forth men, princes. The word actually used is anashim, is used in the Torah in reference to people of distinction. They were princes of the tribes of Israel. And it was very important by the way, that all the tribes were represented. So that whatever happened, they shared in either the reward or the punishment together. And in those days, as opposed to ours, those leaders were actually men of

character. They were tzadikim, they were righteous men, they were men of standing and of wisdom, which we must remember so we can keep in mind exactly how nuanced and sophisticated this mistake was. Hindsight is 20/20. Things were not clear, even to these most righteous of men. And it's so important to remember this, right? This rule, this principle throughout all of our studies in Torah and Tanakh.

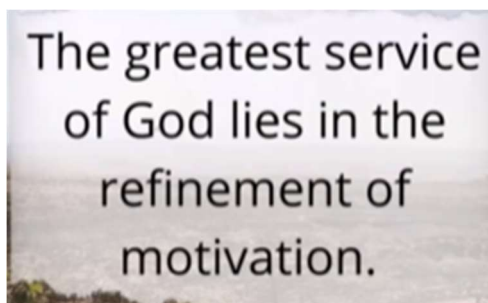
But I find it particularly we need to apply it in the generation of the desert. That we cannot judge them. And if we do judge them, we should only do so with favor and compassion. Because as I believe we're going to see and we may already know in our hearts, we all have a voice of the spies somewhere within us. We all have that voice deep down. And some of us listen to it more and some of us listen to it less. And sometimes when we're not ready, that's when it really crops his head. And that's why we need to be ready all the time. We need to constantly immerse ourselves in Torah and prepare ourselves for when that attack comes.

Ok, so that's the first point of reflection and meditation that I want to make. So, you know, I read to you the above verse in English, but I believe that there's really a grave mistake in that translation. I think it's so off that it actually borders on being a mistranslation on the part of Art

Scroll. And I'm an Art Scroll fan, I like the Art Scroll people, and so I say that with humility. Maybe there's a reason they use that word, but for the life of me, I can't figure it out, why they said that word. But if I were translating it, the verse would say, "Send forth men if you please and let them TOUR the Land of Canaan that I give to the children of Israel."

The word in Hebrew for "to spy" is l'ragel, the word that is used however, is l'tour, which means literally "to tour," right? Not once, the Lubavitcher Rebbe points out, not once were they ever called "spies," and the reason is because they weren't sent to spy anything out. They were sent as tourists, and spies and tourists could not be more different from each other, right? A spy has the intention to undermine things, right? To subvert. Whereas a tourist has the intention to encounter and to observe, to be a tourist, right? That's what a tourist wants to do, to be a tourist, to have a good time. Tourists are drawn to the most beautiful spots, to the most impressive elements of the place that they're going to see. Whereas spies are looking for blemishes and weaknesses that can be exploited. So the spies were supposed to enter and depart the Land as tourists, not as spies.

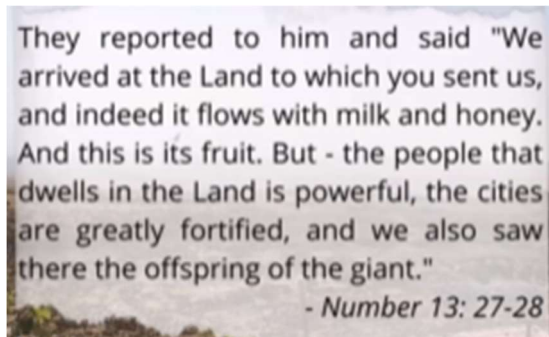
And so there, in the very first verse, we already see the seeds that were planted which blossomed into this horrible mess. They were sent in as tourists, and when they arrived, somewhere along the way, they became spies. Their eyes shifted. Maybe it wasn't even intentional. Maybe it was just a lack of focus which could happen to any of us by the way. Maybe they just forgot their "why." Right? The "why." We talk about this all the time. Rav Dessler said, and I've quoted this before and I'm going to put it up as a slide because it's so important. He says:



Why we do what we do. Maybe they just forgot their "why," right? What Moses told them was their purpose. It's a possibility. It happens to me all the time. And that's, by the way is one of the reasons that I try to be so disciplined to pray regularly. Because I find that often it's in prayer that I'm best able to get back on track and to calibrate myself and remember why exactly it is that I'm doing whatever it is I'm doing. To keep my why in line with my heart and my mind. To keep myself focused.

Anyway, so when they came back and started offering their opinions and advice it was clear that they had become spies, right? They officially became spies when they started spouting their opinions on things. They were not hired to bring back their perspectives and their commentaries. They were on a fact-finding mission, and they did not remain loyal to that mission. They weren't supposed to give commentaries, they were supposed to give interpretation, just the facts. But I've seen in my life personally, personally, and often in the lives of the people who turn to me for support and guidance. Often we are not at all conscious

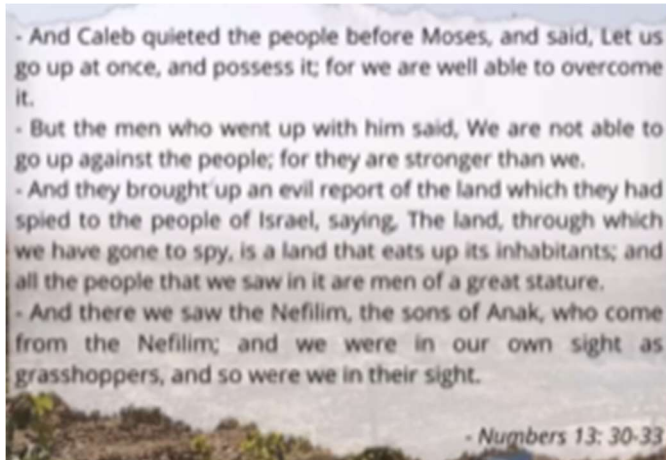
or aware of where reality ends and our perception of reality begins, right? Without realizing it, we start to conflate our own narrative and our own perspective with the truth. And we don't even realize that that's happening. We come to believe that the way we see things are the only way that they could be seen. The most objective way they can be seen. And if we see any other way, we're fooling ourselves, right? That when we share our take on things we're actually sharing things as they really are. But this my friends was their fatal error. Because as we see, they were actually totally wrong. They were wrong. They couldn't have been more mistaken, right? Let's look back inside. Verse 27:



Now Nachmanides points out, Ramban Nachmanides points out that one word, there is one word, the word efes, which means "but," that one word was really the point where things officially started going bad. What does that mean? What does "but" mean? If I say to Jeremy, "Jeremy you know, you are a really good friend, but...." Well that "but," that's where he's going to really start

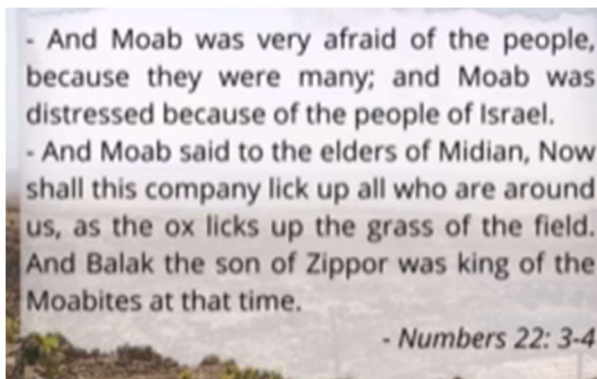
listening. Because that's where the truth of the message lies. That's where I'm going to say what I've really come to say.

And so the Ramban explains that if they were just reporting the facts, the word, "but" would not be need to qualify anything. Because the word "but" is always followed by a direct contradiction to the words that came right before them. So in this case, they were communicating to the nation that yes, the Land is beautiful, that's true, "but" it was out of their reach. That it was because of this very beauty, it was because of the very magnificence of the Land, itself, that they simply couldn't do it. God forbid. That conquering the Land would be impossible. So you know, as we know, their conclusion that they were so sure was the objective truth, couldn't have been more wrong. I think we spoke about this before, but it's worth revisiting. Their conclusion was actually the opposite of the reality on the ground. Let's look inside:



And so were we in their sight. Now pay attention to those last words. The last words. The lack of self-awareness is so glaring, that it's almost...it's almost endearing, right? It's one thing for them to say, "They were huge and we felt like little incy, wincy, little grasshoppers." It's one thing for them to say that, but no. They said, "And we were grasshoppers in their eyes as well." How did they know? How did they know? Did they ask them?

No, they didn't. Because if they had, do you know what they would have found out? Exactly the opposite. Right? Skip ahead two portions to the Torah portion of Parashat Balak, chapter 22, verse 3:



That's right, the inhabitants of the Land didn't see them as grasshoppers. They were terrified. Nations that were enemies were putting aside their differences and joining forces against the Israelites. They were so afraid. They were fighting for their existence, for their own survival. The king of the Moabites was so scared that he likened the Israelites not to grasshoppers, but to oxen. They were

devouring everything in their path.

Now for a moment, I want to take a step back, and give a little bit more attention to these spies and what their motivation might have been. Now, we could take up the whole Fellowship talking about this very point and the sages of Israel do not spare any ink on this question. But I just want to touch on one potential motivation that always struck me as fundamentally true. And really, there's quite a consensus among the commentators that this is at least part of the picture. They explain that the issue with the spies wasn't just an issue of projection or poor judgment. It was fundamentally a philosophical issue. The spies and the entire generation that had been living in the desert, had been living the most profoundly spiritual existence that you can imagine. They were like a baby breastfeeding from his mother. That's what the manna was like. It was like breast milk to a baby. Blatant miracles became their daily routine. Miracles became nature for them. They were supernaturally liberated from servitude, the servitude to the greatest superpower in world history, which was wiped out by the very waters that parted to save them. And the mobile pillar of clouds which sheltered them and led them by the day and a pillar of fire led them at night. And their water was from a miraculous well and their food fell out of the sky. They were just living this purely spiritual existence. And the spies

recognized that the nation had been sheltered from the material world. And if they were to enter the Land of Israel, all of that would change. That they would have to work the Land and plow the Land and plant and they would have to harvest. And they would need a government, and they would need an army.

And then so the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that when the spies said that the Land of Israel is a Land which consumes its inhabitants, they were saying that it is a Land that has so many, you know, natural world demands and this worldly requirements, just to survive...that you know that all of the demands of this world would completely consume them, would eat them up, would consume the nation and deny them the time, the ability and the headspace and the awareness to be fully immersed in spirituality and godliness as they were in the desert. And that's why we were created as a nation. That was the reason, right? The spies were afraid that the nation would be so consumed with the work of their own hands and the illusion that their success or their failure was a product of their own strength and their own abilities that they would be just so immersed in the physical that they would cease being the spiritual people that HaShem wants them to be. Right? Does that make sense, at least does it make sense?

So in that way, it wasn't necessarily a lack of the spies faith in God that deterred them, because some people read that they said that the people were "yoter chazak mimenu." Mimenu is "than us." But they say the dots should have been on the top of the vav, mimeno, that they were saying that the people were more strong than God, right? But it wasn't necessarily that they had a lack of faith in God. I don't think that that was it. I think on a deeper level, what their issue really was, that they didn't believe in the nation. Right? That they didn't believe that the nation could stand up to the test of being immersed in physicality and materialism without losing their spiritual strength and their connection to HaShem. And that's what really just makes it all so tragic.

The spies, you know, sometimes when we're so smart, when we're so holy, when we're so intelligent, we start actually thinking that we can grasp Divine wisdom. And the spies made a fundamental, philosophical error. That they didn't realize that it was the merging of those two worlds that is exactly HaShem's greatest desire. That it was exactly this merging of the physical and the spiritual that is the deepest purpose for creation. That's why God wanted to send us into the Land of Israel. But let's think about it. What is a human being at our essence, right? We're earth, we're dirt, that is infused and animated by a soul. By a soul, right? By a piece of God, Himself. And our mission is to elevate these animalistic impulses of that dirt from which our physical bodies are made and just through the sheer force of our ratzon, our deepest desire, our desire comes from the soul. From the sheer force of our desire in our soul to cleave to God and love Him with all of our hearts. And overcoming all of the natural, worldly impulses that we may have. The purpose is to build a dwelling place for God in the lowest dimension of existence, in the physical world that we find ourselves in right now. We've discussed this so

many times in the Fellowship because it's really the central idea to the question of "why" which underlies our very existence.

So the spies didn't want to let the nation, you know, grow up. They wanted to keep them completely and totally reliant on the miracles and the Divine intervention in the desert. And we've all seen or heard about, you know, about unhealthy parent relationships where the parent never really wants to let the child become independent and stand on their own feet. And they have this unhealthy co-dependent relationship with their child. It's the greatest disservice you can do to a child and those relationships never end well. And that's what the spies were really going for. Thankfully, they weren't in charge, but they did tremendous damage, even if their intentions were good. Because that's not what HaShem wants from us.

The Divine plan was to cradle the nation of Israel in the desert by sustaining us on these nature defying miracles. To show us and ensure us that HaShem is with us and providing for us faithfully, always. And then to empower us to take that knowledge and take that understanding and take that faith with us into the Land and harness it to elevate the physicality of the mundane natural world by revealing the Divine godliness within it. And the reason this was all so tragic, right? The Rebbe says, is because it was supposed to be that generation. That generation had the unique opportunity to perfect creation right then and there. If the generation of the desert would have had the bandwidth and the spiritual fortitude and the range to first live a life of pure, unadulterated spirituality in the desert and then that very same generation, to enter the Land and infuse that spiritual truth into every aspect of life in eretz Yisrael, well that would have been it right there. That would have been Mashiach like we spoke about earlier. That generation could have fulfilled the mission.

But they failed and now we're here. We are where we are after thousands of years, back in the Land of Israel and we're in the final stages of putting the pieces back together and elevating the physical to the spiritual as can only be accomplished by the nation of Israel in the Land of Israel. It was in their hands, really that generation's hands to put the holy in the holy Land. They could have done it. But they didn't do it, right? And now it's up to us.

So Rav Simon Jacobson, he explains that they fell victim to the very human pitfall of compartmentalization, of putting spiritual pursuits and endeavors of the soul in one box. This is particularly in America. I see this with American Jewry a lot. This happens, it happened to me when I was there. You know, such as prayer in synagogue or Torah study in the yeshiva. And then, the other box is the real world, right? Where you got to put the superstition aside and do what you got to do to do what you got to do. And to a certain degree, we were able to continue compartmentalizing throughout the 2000 years of the exile. But the Land of Israel just doesn't tolerate it. It doesn't cater to the illusion of compartmentalization. It demands integration, it facilitates integration. It creates integration. The Land simply does not allow for this cognitive dissonance of compartmentalization. The Land refines us and burns away our

illusions by forcing us to encounter the deepest truth of creation. Ain ode milvado, that there is nothing other than God in the world. That while we must do everything in our power to try to help ourselves...ultimately, we are helpless and our fate is totally in HaShem's Hands. And it's prayer more than anything that will provide us with our salvation and our redemption.

That's how it is in the Land, itself. Right? From the rain dependent topography, we don't have topography like other lands that have their own source of water that is terrestrial like the Nile River, we don't have that. You know, we depend on the rain from the heavens. We're surrounded by enemies, to the laws and the Torah of the agriculture, itself. Laws that don't apply to any other Land. Orlah, trumah, ma'aseh the Sabbatical, the Jubilee...all of these laws remind us that the Land is alive. That the Land is alive, right? That it's infused by God's essence. And just as we need our Sabbaths, so the Land needs its Sabbath as well. And being in Israel reminds us that everything is in HaShem's Hands. Everything is governed and controlled by the Creator of the Universe.

In the Land of Israel, you know our prayer isn't relegated to the synagogue. But it follows us into the fields, it follows us into the army, it follows us into the commerce. Only in the Land of Israel can we really transform and evolve both personally and nationally to be living embodiments of the words of King David that Jeremy just quoted from Psalm 69 – And as for me, I am my prayer. Right? We become living embodiments of our prayer in the Land of Israel. We go to synagogue and we pray in the morning with our lips and then we go into the fields and we pray with our hands and with our feet and with our shovels and with our axes and we go to war and we pray with our m16's and our weapons. We become our prayers in the Land of Israel. The compartmentalization of the exile simply doesn't work here, right? Whether we like it or not, when the nation of Israel begins to settle in the Land...really heaven begins to settle upon the earth.

And that's the real reason that we love the Land of Israel. Not because it's an end in and of itself, but because it is the unique vehicle that is perfectly tailored to us with which we can elevate the entire world to godliness. Our love for the Land is like...it's like a direct outcropping of our love for HaShem. It's His Land, it's not ours, and we're simply entrusted with it. And that is what we need to focus on. Because ultimately, that's what all of this comes down to. It comes down to focus. To train our eyes to see what is the truth, what we really need to see.

When the spies...when they made their calculation, that the materialism of the Land would consume the nation, they failed to take one thing into account. That the Land of Israel is radically different than every other place on earth. They didn't see the sweetness of the Land and the holiness of the Land. This is what it says in Deuteronomy:

"A Land that the Lord your God seeks out. The eyes of the Lord your G-d are always upon it; from the beginning of the year to the end of the year"
- Deuteronomy 11:12

Moses sent the spies into the Land expecting them to see that truth. Hoping for them to see that truth, praying for them to see the unique, spiritual qualities of the Land. But they just didn't have the eyes to see it. They didn't have the eyes to see it. But we can. We must. We need to have the eyes to see it. And if there's one mission that I think we have here in this Fellowship,

one great theme, it's to fix our eyes, right? To develop Mashiach eyes, eyes of Messiah. Eyes of redemption, right? We've lost our perspective for the past two thousand years. Our vision has become blurry and confused.

Just think about it. For so long, here in this Fellowship, so many of us have hated each other. So many of us. And now HaShem is giving us the eyes to see that in truth, we're brothers and we love each other. Somehow, in all of the confusion, we have found each other. And we're giving each other the eyes again. We're helping each other see, like the spies entered the Land and saw nothing but blemishes and threats. And it would be easy to fall victim to the same exact pitfalls today. There's so many things that can paralyze us with fear. So many things that can cast doubt in our hearts. That was what crippled the vision of the spies. Their fear, whether it was fear of the inhabitants of the land or fear of the inability that the nation would be able to stay holy in the Land, however you look at it, they were afraid and they were scared. And that's exactly what Joshua and Caleb proclaimed in response to those fear-based arguments that the spies made, they didn't address all of the arguments, they went to the core. Let's look at Numbers chapter 14, verse 7:

- They spoke to the entire assembly of the children of Israel saying "The land that we passed through to spy it out - the Land is very very good."
- If the Lord delights in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which flows with milk and honey.
- Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not.
- Numbers 14:7-10

So allow me to bless us, my friends. I want to bless us that we are able to hold each other up as Joshua did for Caleb and as Caleb did for Joshua. Please, HaShem, let us be voices of faith and courage in a world that is being attacked by fear and doubts like never before. HaShem give us the eyes to look at our lives, to look at the Land of Israel, to look at the world right now, and remember that You are with us, and that our enemies, whether

they're enemies in our own hearts, enemies within us or enemies without, that they pose no real threat to us. That they're our bread. That their protection has departed from them. Help us know, HaShem, both in our head and our hearts that You are with us and that there is nothing for us to fear. Put words in our mouth, HaShem, beautiful words, beautiful words about the Land of Israel that You've bless us to begin returning to. May nothing but praise for You and Your Land to be on our tongues.

And now, my friends, I'm so eager to bless you, but I thought I would just take this opportunity before that to wind down our 100th session by reading the 100th Psalm of King David, right? Which of course feels like it was composed explicitly for the purpose of celebrating this session right now. If you have your Tanakh's, you can open up to it. Jeremy has a beautiful song to this.

(Ari reads in Hebrew) A Psalm of thanksgiving. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all of the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before His Presence with singing. KNOW that the Lord is God. It is He who made us and we belong to Him. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His Name. For the Lord is good, His loving kindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness endures for all generations. Amen.

Could there have been a more perfect Psalm to recite together? And so now my friends, allow me to bless you with the holy blessing that the High Priest blessed the nation with, from the Temple times up until today. And as I tell you every Fellowship, I'm not a Cohen, I'm not a priest, I'm not a descendant of Aaron, I'm an Israelite. But we as the nation of Israel are blessed with the privilege of being a nation of priests, an am kohanim. And so with that directive, it's my great honor to bless all of you.

Aaronic blessing in Hebrew

May God bless and protect you. May He shine His light and His countenance upon you. And may He give you peace. Amen.

Reach out, my friends. Stay in touch. Stay connected. Jeremy's doing this new Joshua series. I'm about to announce next week a new thing I have up my sleeve that I'm very excited about. Love you all so much. Shalom, shalom!